“Mauser Rifles in 1930s Palestine.” V. 4. Mar. 13, 2024.

> What types of rifles did the Arab rebel al-Qassam use in Palestine in the 1930s?

The 1930s in Palestine were a turbulent period marked by increasing tensions and hostilities between the Arab and Jewish communities, as well as with the British colonial authorities. This period saw the rise of various groups and individuals who engaged in armed resistance against both British rule and Jewish immigration. One notable figure from this era was Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a Syrian-born Islamic scholar and preacher who became a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Al-Qassam led a group of rebels in the early 1930s, advocating for armed struggle against the British and Zionist settlers.

During this period, the types of rifles used by Arab rebels, including those under al-Qassam's command, were diverse and often depended on what was available through local procurement, smuggling, or capture from opposing forces. The firearms landscape in the region at the time was a patchwork of various models, many of which were remnants from previous conflicts, such as World War I, or were smuggled into the area through various channels. Here are some of the rifles that were likely used by al-Qassam and his rebels:

1. **British Lee-Enfield**: The Lee-Enfield rifle was one of the most common firearms in use during this period, especially in regions under British control or influence. It was the standard issue for the British Army and was widely used by colonial police forces. Many of these rifles found their way into the hands of Arab rebels through capture or desertion. The Lee-Enfield was known for its reliability and accuracy, making it a favored rifle among various groups.
2. **French Lebel and Berthier Rifles**: These rifles were used by the French military and could have been obtained by Arab rebels through smuggling or during the interwar period, as France controlled neighboring territories such as Lebanon and Syria. These bolt-action rifles were less common than the Lee-Enfield but were still effective weapons.
3. **Mauser Rifles**: The German Mauser was another common weapon of the era, used in various conflicts around the world. Variants such as the Gewehr 98 or the Karabiner 98k could have been in the hands of the rebels. Mauser rifles were known for their durability and accuracy and were highly sought after by various factions.
4. **Ottoman Rifles**: Given the recent end of Ottoman control over the region (the Ottoman Empire dissolved in 1922), various Ottoman-made or used rifles could still be in circulation, including the Mauser-based Ottoman 7.65mm rifle.
5. **Smuggled and Homemade Firearms**: In addition to standard military rifles, Arab rebels often used whatever firearms they could smuggle into the territory or manufacture clandestinely. This included older, outdated models and homemade firearms, reflecting the improvisational nature of their struggle.

Al-Qassam's campaign was characterized by guerrilla tactics, ambushes, and raids on British and Jewish targets, relying on the element of surprise and the terrain's advantage. The firearms used were less about the specific model and more about their availability and the ability of the rebels to maintain a supply of ammunition. After al-Qassam's death in a skirmish with British forces in 1935, his legacy inspired further uprisings, most notably the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, where the types of rifles mentioned continued to play a crucial role.

> Which Mauser rifle models are known to have been used in the 1936-39 Arab Rebellion in Palestine?

During the 1936-39 Arab Revolt in Palestine, various groups engaged in armed resistance against British colonial forces and Jewish communities. The revolt saw a diverse array of weapons used by the Arab insurgents, reflecting the period's complexity and the various sources through which these groups obtained arms. Among the most renowned and sought-after weapons were Mauser rifles, which had gained a reputation for reliability, accuracy, and durability. These characteristics made them highly valued by the rebels.

Several models of Mauser rifles were known to be in circulation and likely used during the Arab Revolt, including:

1. **Mauser Gewehr 98 (G98)**: This was the standard German infantry rifle during World War I, and large numbers were produced. In the interwar period, surplus G98 rifles found their way to various markets and conflict zones, including Palestine. The Gewehr 98 is a bolt-action rifle chambered in the 7.92×57mm Mauser caliber, known for its effective range and stopping power.
2. **Karabiner 98k**: Although the Karabiner 98k became the standard German service rifle in 1935, just before the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, it's plausible that some examples could have found their way into the region through smuggling or international arms trade. The Kar98k is a shorter, more modern version of the G98, also chambered for the 7.92×57mm Mauser cartridge.
3. **Mauser M1916 and M1893**: These rifles were Spanish Mausers that might have found their way to Palestine through various channels. Spain produced several Mauser designs for its military, which saw action in conflicts like the Spanish Civil War. Given the global arms trade and the proximity of the Spanish Civil War to the Arab Revolt's timeframe, it's conceivable that these models could have been among those circulating in the region.
4. **Ottoman Mausers**: During its rule over much of the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire utilized various Mauser rifles, including the 7.65mm Mauser. After the empire's dissolution, these weapons remained in the region, and some could have been used by Arab rebels. The most common of these were likely the Mauser Model 1893 and 1903, originally chambered in 7.65×53mm Mauser but possibly rechambered to other calibers.

The presence of these Mauser models in the Arab Revolt highlights the global nature of arms trading and the circulation of military surplus weapons. These rifles, renowned for their design and effectiveness, would have been prized assets for the rebels, providing them with the capability to engage British and Jewish forces at range. The procurement of weapons was a significant challenge for the Arab insurgents, relying on smuggling, capture, and the clandestine local manufacture of arms. The use of Mauser rifles, among others, is indicative of the varied and international sources of armaments that fueled the conflict in Palestine during this period.